A Former Foster Youth’s Journey and Acceptance into a University: A Qualitative Research Design

- Student Name
- Dr. T. Domina, Dr. J. Castellanos
- University of California, Irvine
Overview

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In 2000, 88% of people over the age of 25 and less than 30 had earned a high school diploma or a GED.

66% of the high school graduates within this age cluster had finished some college.

32% of all had reached to the level of a bachelor's degree or higher.

(Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2000).
Background

- There are approximately 500,000 children in foster care.
- Approximately 98,000 children in foster care in California
- About 18,400 of them reside in group homes and require the highest—and most expensive—levels of care.
- Almost 4,000 of these children receive their education in non-public schools
- Remainder attend public schools
In Comparison to Their Peers

- Foster youth graduate high school at a 50% rate, which is 38% lower than the national average.
- College entrance range from 2%-11% (Festinger, 1983)
- College completion ranges <1% to 5% in some studies
Attainment from birth of 1981

- High School Grad: 32%
- GED: 25%
- Dropout: 40%
- AA: 1%
- BA: 0%
- College Voc: 2%
How School Affects Foster Youth

- School plays an important role in the lives of most children in foster care.

- For every child, education is critical to successful transition to adulthood.
What Happens to Foster Youth

- Numerous changes in placement that require changes in schools.
- Foster children must cope with the emotional consequences of such instability.
- Adjust to new teachers, classmates, curriculum and rules.
Results of Removal

Often results in:

- Lost credits
- Delayed academic progress
- Repetition of grades
- Delays in student records
- Loss of Relationships
Problem

- According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) there are approximately 300,000 young adults ages 18 to 25 years old, and have spent at least one year in foster care.
- Many former foster youth experience difficulties when transitioning into the college life (Zetlin, & Shea, 2003).
Purpose

- To investigate and collect new information of one former foster youth and to explore the life experiences in a university setting.
- This study is intended to fill literature gaps within higher education for former foster youth adults.
- To look into the self-reported experiences of former foster youth about their educational experiences and achievement abilities.
Their Journey…

- We can look at their experiences through a psycho-socio-cultural framework (PSC)

- Look into students’ educational experience from three dimensions: psychological, social, and cultural elements.

(Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000)
Literature Review

- Three common themes emerged while addressing college admission.
- These themes include: psychological, social, and cultural factors.
- These fundamentals have a major impact on the education that students receive and demonstrate what they need to achieve success.
Psychological

- Personal Aspirations, self-esteem, and stress have been seen as fluctuating factors when considering higher education after high school graduation (Blome, 1997).

- The term resiliency is used in previous research to show how some children may have the ability to overcome life risks and overwhelming odds.
Social

- Family Involvement
- Peers
- Disconnection
- Resources
Cultural

- Cultural identity
- Access to information
- Social workers
- Foster Families
- Biological Families
Methods

Site, participants, instrumentation, procedures

- One female former foster youth, Sophomore attending the University of California, Irvine.
- Study was conducted in a Qualitative format.
- The researcher used interviews with one former foster youth and her foster family to understand the life experiences while in a university setting.
- During 15 weeks, the researcher acted as an active participant talking to the participant with unstructured interviews, in person and via telephone.
Psychological Results

- The participant showed strong resiliency, self motivation, and high self esteem to prepare and succeed in college.

- The participant uses her past obstacles to motivate her to be strong, and when the participant achieves her goals, it increases her self confidence, and gives her strength to try even harder while in college.

- The participant uses personal methods to cope with the stress such as venting to close peers.
What do you think has made you confident?

- “What I think has mad me confident is life, with all the tribulations that has been put in front of me. I feel like I have persevered through growing up. Even when times got rough, like when my mom let me down[...] When I found out that life would be okay, and I found out that I survived, I felt motivated. Emancipation was a break through for me. The judge and lawyers saw the confidence in me, which built my confidence higher too”
What about your past motivates you?

- “My step father who constantly told me I was worthless, it was so traumatizing to where I believed him and that I was nothing.”

- “[…]Once I reached my turning point in high school, realizing that those were just words and I can overcome that, I started succeeding on my own, I started to use the fear as a challenge, and I used what I thought I couldn’t do to push myself even harder.”
What are your specific coping means?

- "I think my most effective mean is talking, I love to talk. I am not a diary writer, or journal type…I just don’t do that. I definitely reach out to my close friends a lot. If I have an issue I ask them first. Good thing is that I do have reliable friends. That is my first method, to talk it out, then I find out how to fix the solution."
Describe a technique that you use to reduce your stress

- “Psychologically, I just tell my self to calm down, and I think about my actions before I do them, Sometimes I plan out what I should do, and sometimes I just ponder on the stress and I let it build up, which is not good, but it happens. I think I just talk it out with myself, and then go to my friends.”
Social Results

- The participant reported two strong social relationships while in college, one was a female, and the other was a 2 ½ year relationship with her boyfriend. Her foster family consisted of two teachers, who encouraged her for college as well.
- Ever since she was 12, the participant knew she was going to college because of her elementary school and their resources for her.
- The participant’s high school had resources to help her find a college.
Did your friends help you stay involved on campus in high school?

- “Yes, they were in clubs with me and some classes too, and I never did stop any activity when I moved, so yes they did help in a sense.”
- “I had a lot, but not any that were really close to me that I could tell everything to.”
- “I only told like 2 of my close friends what happened.”
- “I told my other friends, who were not so close to me that I was moving, but they never knew why.”
Describe your Social Worker

- “I hated her. She never knew our names.”
- “She told me I could never go to college because I could never afford it and she told me I should reconsider my future.”
- “I fear that if I didn’t have the internal drive that I do have, having a social worker like her may have put me in a pathway of no future, academically, and that made me scared for others who may not be like me, who may have wanted to go to college, and she gave a negative reinforcement, it made me angry.”
Can you describe a time when your boyfriend supported you?

- “Yes, he is always supportive. One specific time was when I was getting ready to go to this summer program and I told him that I was afraid that I was going to be the youngest one in the program, and people would not like me, but he told me that I was ready and I was chosen for a reason. He really believes in me, which is what I love about him.”
Cultural Results

- The participant lived with her birth family until she was 15, and then she was placed into foster care until she was 17, then she emancipated.
- The participant’s biological family and foster family were two different ethnicities, which had little *effect* on the idea or process to go to college.
- Both families encouraged the idea of college while the participant was in high school.
- The participant became religious with her boyfriend around age 16, which gave her strength throughout the emancipation process.
“My foster parents who were teachers. My golf coach was really supportive; always made sure I did well academically. My (biological) mom has always been supportive, she never got angry at me for being too busy, she always said education was the most important thing. She was more of an emotional support to me. I never received academic support until I got my foster parents, because they would edit my homework and things like that. Before that, I used other teachers to look over my stuff. My boyfriend was a good supporter my last year of high school as well.”
Who helped you the most while in high school to get you prepared for College?

- “Myself, I think throughout my high school years I had a huge transition and the only thing that stayed constant was myself. My mom was supportive and the foster parents were supportive too, but it would have meant nothing if I was not strong with myself, I was my own reminder. I did everything without a person carrying me through it. I was so ready, I wanted to do it on my own, and I did.”
Describe your Resources in High School

“I think I had everything; I love my high school for that reason. I think they had a good writing department, which made me a good writer. I think they constantly kept us on our toes on how to go to college. They told us deadline and everything! We even had workshops to learn all of that. I feel my school was a great provider. Maybe I feel special because I got the most support than a general student because the teachers all knew me and helped me more and used their resources. I didn’t miss out on anything.”
Questions?